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ABSTRACT

This site visit report reviews activities of Monadnock Developmental Services, Inc., a program serving people with developmental disabilities in one New Hampshire region. The report focuses on the development of employment services in the state and region, including system change strategies, practices being used to support people in jobs, and current issues and dilemmas. Sections of the report address: the development of integrated employment in New Hampshire through the 1980s; state and regional funding structures for employment; and the development of employment opportunities in Region V of the state, utilizing such principles as closure of sheltered workshops, tying of funding directly to people needing services (rather than providers), person-centered planning and individualized job placements, development of natural supports on the job, and facilitation of school-to-work transition. Three Region V agencies were visited, and three individuals being served by the program are described. Specific issues are identified, including low staff salaries, transportation needs, the requirement that 6 hours of service be provided each day, waiting lists, and possible overselling of supported employment. (DB)

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TOWARD INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

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TOWARD INTEGRATED

EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

TOWARD INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

by

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Syracuse University

January 1993

This report is based on a qualitative research site visit to Region V, Monadnock Developmental Services, Inc. in Keene, New Hampshire on October 23-25, 1991 to study the area of employment. Supplemental state data was collected in a visit to Concord, New Hampshire. Preparation of this report was supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), under Cooperative Agreement No. H133B00003-90 awarded to the Center on Human Policy, School of Education, Syracuse University. The opinions express herein are soley those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education; therefore, no official endorsement should be inferred.

> If we assume that all people, with or without a disability, need access to housing then we cannot deny that people need stable, gainful employment in an environment that allows each person to fully experience and contribute their abilities. Supported employment is a mechanism for people with disabilities to acquire and maintain successful employment in real work settings. Sheltered vocational services that sequester groups of people in non-productive, facility-based programs will be challenged to join the ranks of successful employment agencies that support people in real work settings (New Decade, New Decisions, 1991).

This excerpt, included by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services and the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Services in a document New Decade, New Decisions (1991), describes the philosophy and direction of Monadnock Developmental Services, Inc. in Keene, New Hamphshire.

Monadnock Developmental Services, in Region V, is one of the 12 area agencies in New Hampshire and serves approximately 350 people with a $6.5 million budget. This region is located in the southwest corner of the state with a population of 92,000 in 1990. The region was nominated within the state as having good examples of integrated employment services and supports, which will be the focus of this case study.

This report is based on site visits in October, 1991 to private non-profit agencies in this region, interviews with people involved in or knowledgeable about state and regional vocational services (including the director of the agea agency, agency directors, service recipients, employers, parents, consultants hired to work in the region, and a university professor), and a review of pertinent documents. This report focuses on the development of

employment services in the state and region, including system change strategies, practices being used to support people in jobs, and current issues and dilemmas.

Development of Integrated Employment in New Hampshire

Prior to the early 1980s, New Hampshire had developed a continuum of vocational services resembling that of most states in the country: work activity centers, sheltered workshops, and competitive employment. Supported employment was introduced nationally around 1984, and New Hampshire rapidly began to develop this approach. According to the Community Services Reporter of the National Association of State Mental Retardation Program Directors, Inc. (May, 1991), the growth of supported employment in New Hampshire between 1986-1988 was spurred by several key factors. First, the state's low unemployment rate at the time created a receptive environment in which to secure jobs. Second, the State Office of Community Developmental Services (OCDS) placed a major emphasis on the development of supported employment throughout the State, assisting provider agencies to phase out center-based programs. Third, the State Developmental Disabilities Council and University Affiliated Program at the University of New Hampshire both focused their training and technical assistance activities on supported employment. Finally, in 1987 the state received one of the federal statewide systems change grants for supported employment.

A New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities Council document

lists several other changes affecting the state's success in supported employment, including the state Medicaid Community Care Waiver which was being rewritten at the time of the visit to change existing disincentives to work and the enactment of family support legislation that fostered the involvement and leadership of families in service planning. By 1988 roughly 40 percent of the 1130 adults with developmental disabilities funded by OCDS were participating in supported employment, among the highest percentage nationwide at the time (see The Community Services Reporter, Bulletin No. 88-9, March 31, 1988).

The development of integrated work set the tone for other service delivery changes in the state. As one state administrator said:

> ...my learning started with supported employment. ...it didn't make any sense for us to take people and send them to Laconia and then let them stay up there twenty years, bring them back and find them a job in their community. So I really began to emphasize early intervention and family support so we wouldn't go through a process of having kids leave the state to different places and then put them into integrated options in their communities.

Beginning in 1989, the economy began to falter and New Hampshire's unemployment rate rose to one of the highest in New England. Despite this, the percentage of people in supported employment has remained relatively steady. The 1990 distribution of participants by type of placement is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: 1990 Percentage of People in Employment by Placement Type

Placement Type	Percentage of People
Individual Jobs	31.2
Enclaves	30.0
Bench Work	15.2
Mobile Crews	10.5
Co-worker Supervised	9.9
Small Business	3.3

As can be seen in Table 1, a large percentage of people (55%) appeared to be in group placements as of 1990. Enclaves, bench work, and mobile crews are typically less integrated than one person-one job situations (Brown et al., 1991).

Although the State has no written policy on conversion, some believe that sheltered workshops are being phased out. According to one state official:

> Sheltered workshops are now passe. They haven't gone away. VR won't even talk with them anymore, won't fund it anymore, which in a sense is positive because VR is really into supported employment because they have to be; it's a federal mandate. But we took a different tact. We just said we are going to provide an option for supported employment; we are going to provide more opportunities for supported employment; we are going to show parents what the benefits are for supported employment and if it is good enough, they will select it. ...at some point we'll have to make, I think, a decision and say this is fine, you may make the choice of sheltered workshop, but our level of support is going to have to go down for that because we really don't think that's the appropriate choice. But we are not ready to do that yet, I don't think. It is still too much of a

> political battle for constituency, and the sheltered workshops have a very large constituency, that if you polarize the constituency now, I am not convinced there is enough of it to win the battle, to say fine, we are going to eliminate sheltered workshops. So we are still moving along the dimension that more and more people are moving into supported employment and less and less into sheltered workshops.

The majority of the large sheltered workshops in the state are gone, but there are several that still exist, many of which are on a downsizing track.

State and Regional Funding Structures for Employment

Compared to many states, the funding structure for employment services and supports in New Hampshire is very simple. The state funnels money through 12 area agencies that provide and/or contract for services from community agencies. Area agencies receive state monies that are primarily comprised of state general funds called Community Developmental Services (CDS) dollars and Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver dollars. Area agencies may also receive United Way, county, and Vocational Rehabilitation dollars.

The state's share (CDS monies) has decreased while Medicaid dependency has increased. Area agencies have not fought strongly against this shift because the waiver is generally viewed as very flexible.

By state mandate, local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) offices negotiate collaborative agreements each year with area agencies. Vocational Rehabilitation has eligibility and employability requirements for those they serve, so they may not serve all people referred to them for integrated work. In addition, federal

regulations allow up to 18 months of services from VR, but the state has imposed a shorter time period of support - only about 3 months - after which time long term support is sought from area agencies. Both the area agency director and several provider agency directors in Keene viewed this situation as problematic and "hardly worth the trouble" to seek services from VR.

Area agencies set their own regional rates, and therefore may respond differently to budget constraints and other funding issues. The state does not have leverage to hire or fire area agency directors or their boards, or to pull contracts, but it does have considerable control as a funder.

The Development of Employment Opportunities in Region V

From the start of the movement to develop integrated employment in New Hampshire, the Keene region has been viewed as a leader in the state. When the state was looking for a region to develop community employment opportunities around 1986, Keene was selected. Human service personnel in the area had national connections to the University of Oregon and people in other states involved in state-of-the-art practices in supported employment. In fact, one of the current provider agency directors was sent to Oregon in 1986 for training to establish her own supported employment agency. In addition, some agency personnel had been involved with PASS (Program Analysis of Service Systems) and PASSING (Program Analysis of Service Systems' Implementation of Normalization Goals) training, which helped to establish strong values of normalization

and community participation.

In this section, key factors associated with the change process toward integrated employment in Region V will be highlighted.

Workshop closure. The current director of the Region V Area Agency arrived in 1983. At that time there were two major employment providers in Keene running traditional large sheltered workshop programs and providing residential services. According to the current director:

> We took two tacts on trying to move toward supported employment and other employment opportunities. One was to engage sheltered workshops in a downsizing track and the other was to simply set up new corporations. We took state dollars, hired somebody, then set them up with a board of directors and spun it off as a separate not-for-profit corporation totally for supported employment. Two other corporations were set up the same way.

Using these two strategies, the region has disbanded their sheltered workshops as of the summer, 1992.

RFP process. A more recent strategy intended to move toward integrated employment and improve service quality was to implement a new RFP (Request for Proposals) process whereby all community services within the entire regional service system were put up for bids. Provider agencies were required to submit proposals and interview in order to secure contracts. The area agency director hired an out-of-state colleague as a consultant to assist him with this process. This was the only region in the state to do this. According to the area agency director, "We basically took the region apart and put it back together in a six month time period."

As a result of the RFP process, three providers were not funded, leaving five employment providers in the region. According

to the area agency director, the providers that lost their contracts were not moving in the desired direction (integrated work) and did not have a satisfactory plan to do so. Through the RFP process area workshops were reorganized to provide only supported employment.

Performance review and quality assurance. Along with the RFP process, another new procedure has been developed to monitor the performance of service providers. The outside consultant mentioned above is also paid to review providers' performance objectives (developed jointly with the area agency) three or four times per year. The purpose of this process is to encourage people to continue to improve, to give them a benchmark of where they are, to show them where they need to improve, and to give them advice on how to improve. As part of this process, agencies were asked to sign onto operating principles that had been developed within the area agency. The area agency director stated:

> It's the marrying of the performance objectives and the quality assurance that's going to give us a reading. I want to separate the two because if someone is meeting the goals of a contract, that's very different than are people's lives enhanced.

Money tied to people. Most recently, a funding process has been designed that is very different from the procedures used by the area agency to fund programs in the past. Typically, providers receive contracts and funding regardless of the quality, and in some cases quantity of services provided people. Region V decided to revamp the funding structure to make the system more consumer driven, to "cut through the rhetoric" and actually attempt to do

the things talked about in the field. The area agency director wanted to make it clear to providers that they do not own the people they serve; that people should control who provides what services and how. A fee-for-service system is in the process of being enacted that should allow dollars to follow people. That is, day and residential service agencies will only be paid for units of services provided. Service recipients would be free to take their per diem rate to the provider of their choice after planning with their chosen teams.

Since this process will eat into providers' fixed costs, the area agency has established a plan to give agencies a core amount of money to keep them and then pay them only for services rendered. The area agency director believes that through this funding structure people will receive better and more individualized services at less cost. Since this plan was still being developed at the time of the visit, details and outcomes were not available.

Providers and Practices

Three employment providers were visited within Region V. Each agency had been nominated within the state for their promising practices. Visits to each agency were approximately one half day in length and were comprised of interviews with and observations of various people and activities associated with each agency. Specifically, interviews were conducted with each agency director, several staff members, four people with disabilities, two parents, and two employers. Observations of people working were made at

three job sites. The characteristics of these agencies and the various strategies used to support people to get and keep employment will be presented.

All three agencies provided only integrated employment services and supports and all were small. The largest of the three agencies had eight staff serving 42 people, 23 of whom were in supported employment, and 19 of whom were students transitioning out of school who needed only short term support. Another agency served 23 people with five staff, and the third agency served 15 people, about half who are considered supported employees with three to four staff. All considered the small size of their programs and the flat administrative structure to be key factors in their success.

The oldest of these programs was established in 1985 and was reportedly the first provider of supported employment in New Hampshire. The other two agencies were three to three and a half years old. The "newness" of these programs contributed to the development of innovative practices because they did not start with a sheltered facility, and they have been able to reap the benefits of the field's lessons in relation to integrated work.

Person-centered planning and individualized job placements. All three agencies emphasized a person-centered approach to planning that centers around getting to know the person and learning about their dreams. One agency uses an approach to planning similar to Personal Futures Planning (O'Brien, 1987; Mount, 1987 & 1988):

> We are all the team. All of us are going to have to support Mike* and communicate. We're trying to facilitate a real team, not a team of professionals. We talk about where the person is, where they want to go, and what are the needs and capabilities that need to be developed. And that's sort of the roadmap that we then use in terms of what supports need to be provided. How can that be created? Does that need to be from a paid system or can that be from the community? Everyone leaves with responsibilities, so there's that comaraderie.

Each agency described a commitment to individualized job placements in the community. Although in some businesses two people with disabilities worked at the same time in the same area, an agency director said "We provide services based on individual needs, not on those of other agencies or funding sources." The oldest agency started out with work crews. The executive director said:

> My joke was, boy, it took one year to put them [crews] together and five years to get rid of them. ... We were so sick of doing two separate businesses at the same time: running a service business and running an employment agency.

To exemplify how they listen to what a person wants, one agency member told a story about Betty, who had lived in a state school and had been in a workshop. Betty said she wanted to wash dishes and walk to work. The professionals who had worked with Betty said no; she had done well at collating in the workshop, so she should work in an office. The employment agency listened to her desires, knew the Inn keeper down the road from Betty's house, and found her a job there. She has been there three years and loves it. "Now when she goes to work she knows the Inn. She goes

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* All names are pseudonyms

to church with people she knows. She stops every morning at the little general store and hangs out there."

Natural supports. Each agency reported an orientation toward developing natural supports. The term was used to mean support provided by job site personnel and/or other non-human service people. Some of the approaches used to promote natural supports are described here. As one agency director said:

> It really is individualized. I think employers really like that because they have a sense of control and we become a resource to them instead of a tool that they don't know how to use. It's almost like a swiss watch - piece by piece you work it out but you'll never work it out the same way twice.

When asked how work sites supports are developed and who provides them, one staff person responded:

> A lot of times you'll identify a co-worker because that's the natural person to do it 'cause they share the same responsibilities or they're in close proximity. It's not necessarily the best person based on personality makeup. So we've begun to do something a little differently and that is to try and identify the co-worker not from day one, but a little later on so that we can see who clicks and who doesn't.

Another acted as a "bridge-builder," acknowledging that it takes time to get to know people and develop relationships:

> Time is spent helping co-workers get to know the person, highlighting commonalities, and building on social occasions at work. Duration on the job is key.

It is not only the characteristics of the supported employee, but also those of the actual work setting and the people therein that influence the potential for natural supports to evolve. Examinations of workplace cultures can reveal the nature of support provided **any** employee.

> I look at the environment. I look at if the people in the company look like they're happy people. So the first thing I

> do is get a sense of what the company is all about; what their needs are; what they're looking for in employees.

The role of the job coach, or employment specialist, varied somewhat as to how job training was structured for the supported employee. Current literature about natural supports highlights the expertise of employers and supervisors to train and support their workforces. Rather than preempt this process, some advocate that employment specialists assist or supplement this training, if necessary (Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992). One agency uses a more traditional approach whereby the job coach takes the primary responsibility for initial training:

> We begin at the job site before the person starts. We do a job description and task analysis. We're usually involved with initial training. We watch for times to back off and for co-workers to emerge.

Another practice associated with "natural" supports has been to pay employers or co-workers for the assistance they provide supported employees. This practice is somewhat controversial in the field because of its potential to change the nature of relationships. For the most part, stipends to co-workers for providing job supports were not commonly used:

> We try not to use stipends because they can change the dynamics. For example, in one case when the stipend ended the person's hours got cut and he lost the job. We prefer informal rewards such as movie tickets or something.

So much attention is being given to natural supports in New Hampshire and elsewhere in the country that agencies have been asked to showcase this aspect of their services. One agency was particularly sensitive about this:

> We've become real cautious. We'll talk about it [natural supports] but we're real cautious to parade it because these are real valued personal relationships, and always messing with it changes it. If we trumpet a particular employer too much, his rapport with the individual changes. We try not to make a real big deal about them [employers] because we believe that what they do is what they should do.

Some people had developed relationships on the job that spilled over outside of work, but reportedly there was not a lot of this happening. Still, people were very aware of the importance of social interactions and supports to job satisfaction. "You have to consider the social scene and making friends on the job is as important as getting the job done."

To increase the likelihood of people becoming connected in their communities, all three agency directors indicated that it was important to hire local people:

> In our job ad we said you must be an active, involved community member. I have this long history of grabbing people out of places other than human services. Most of my staff here have no experience in human services.
>
> One of the things we look for is for people who are local and for people having business experience.
>
> The best way to get connections is to be connected in the community. We are very grass roots. I think that we are sort of community activists.

School-to-work transition. It appears that schools and adult agencies have just recently begun to work together to facilitate the movement of students from school to postschool work and living. However, the agencies expressed some frustration with not being involved in transition planning, and with the quality of experiences students received while in school:

> ... they are doing some placements in the community. Some are paid, some are volunteer. But I've had students transition from that program to this program and find that they don't have the basic experience I would like, like how to use a pay phone, money, street safety, interviewing skills. They don't graduate with a resume or a high school diploma.

Providing only work related supports versus other supports. One of the providers was considered to be the "purest" by the area agency director because they provide only marketing and employment supports. "Staff do not spend time with folks when they are not working." This particular agency uses primarily VR monies, rather than accept other sources of money and be required to provide six hours per day of "programming." The director of this agency felt strongly that if they got locked into supporting people outside of the work realm to meet their other needs, their focus and effectiveness in the employment arena would be diminished. However, by relying on time-limited VR monies, the agency could only work with people who needed short-term support or would be forced to serve people without reimbursement.

Because of their funding sources, the other two agencies were required to serve people six hours per day and were struggling with how to do this without losing the focus on employment. Some people were brought to these agencies by van in the morning before going out into the community, came back to the agency during the day, and returned to the agency again before being bussed home. During their time in the agency's headquarters, people congregated around a table or sat in a room with little to do. One agency director said they may talk about current events or conduct employment seminars for those spending time at the agency.

Clearly, the dilemma of whether or not to support people outside of their jobs (e.g., to participate in community and leisure activities) was difficult to resolve. On one hand, providers could get side-tracked from their primary role as employment agencies. On the other hand, it is difficult to disregard other aspects of people's lives that impact upon their work performance and overall quality of life, especially if these needs are not being met elsewhere. The key issue here is that funding sources dictated the amount of services that were mandated or allowed, rather than allowing decisions on a person by person basis.

Examples of People in Supported Employment

The people served by the three agencies visited appeared to typify those generally served in supported employment. That is, each agency served people who who had a range of support needs, including some who required intensive supports. This section describes several people in supported employment.

Carl. Carl is a young man who was assisted to pursue an interest by starting his own business. Since he had always enjoyed collecting cans, someone suggested he start a recycling business. Contact was made with the business department of the local college. As part of their program, students in one class were required to work with community businesses. A student was recruited to work with Carl 20 hrs per week to help him set up his business. The area agency paid $600 for the student's course. A business

advisory group of local business people was formed to assist Carl, flyers and letterhead were made, and Carl got shirts with his name and business logo on them. He now has 300 accounts. The agency has a leased vehicle that is used to pick up cans from various businesses around town, and store them at the agency until they are deposited for cash. Carl said the business is going good and he likes it.

Greg. Greg is an older gentleman who lived in Laconia, the state institution, for many years. He now lives with another man with disabilities and receives 24 hour per day supervision. Greg works at a filtering company that makes water cooler units. "I clean bathrooms, paper towels and sweep floors upstairs." He has been there a year and a half working Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. until 10:30 am. After work Greg buys a newspaper and reads it at home, then goes for coffee and donuts in town. About this purchase, Greg proudly said, "I pay."

Greg's parents said "He's happy to have money, happy to do things. We think its wonderful. It's been a tremendous opportunity. He's really grown. He's more independent and speaks words better." Greg visits his parents' home once a month and frequently talks with them by phone.

Megan. Megan earns $5.00 per hour at the food counter of a Gulf Gas Station. She slices meats, prepares other foods, and stocks the coolers with whatever is low. Prior to this job she had been in a sheltered workshop. Her job site supervisor is teaching her to take on more and more responsibilities. This particular

supervisor previously worked at one of the employment agencies in town, but couldn't take the stress of the job.

As is typical nationally in supported employment, most people worked about 20 hours per week and earned at least a minimum wage. Some, however, were paid subminimum wages from the employer via the employment agency. Many of jobs in which people worked also resembled those commonly secured for supported employees, such as fast food restaurants, food service, assembly, and custodial positions.

Issues and Dilemmas for Region V

As in every region of the country, people and programs face many issues and dilemmas in their struggle to achieve a responsive service system. The following issues were either cited by those interviewed, or observed to be areas of concern for Region V.

Six hour per day programming. Agencies that accept Medicaid dollars are required to provide six hours per day of service. For people in group homes this meant being out of their homes from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. five days per week, whereas for those in other living situations the six hours could be scheduled more flexibly. For supported employees working part-time, this meant filling their days with other activities. Unfortunately, this resulted in groups of people present at provider agency offices during the day. Reasons for this were not clear. Was it a lack of creativity on the part of providers or the inflexibility of the six hour requirement?

As a result of the six hour mandate, supported employment costs were said to be high - approximately $10,000 per person per year. According to the area agency director:

> a lot of the money is going into day support. Agencies are becoming day care or activity-type programs as opposed to employment programs. We're not paying them to do social recreation. And if people have down time, why can't they go home and put their feet up on the couch and watch TV or go shopping? That ought to be part of their home life as opposed to their work life. And separating those two is very difficult because of the transportation, staffing issues in the residences or the homes or if they're living at home with their families or families may be working and there's nobody home for them to be with...

There are many issues here that cannot be resolved by simply sending people home when they are not working. What if people need support **wherever** they are? Who will assist people to access their communities and participate fully in daily life? How will people be supported to development relationships with community members? The area agency director stated that the new fee for service contracts (discussed above) were an attempt to ameliorate this issue by only paying providers for specific services rendered; in this case, employment supports.

Low salaries. Staff salaries for agencies providing integrated employment services started at around $14,000 and topped out around $15,000 plus benefits. At the time of this visit, staff had not received a pay raise in three years. This was brought up by all agency people, as well as the area agency director, as a problem. Despite this situation, agencies appeared to be able to attract decent staff people and keep them for a reasonable length of time.

Transportation. Given that Keene is in a relatively rural area, transportation is an ongoing issue. "People live really far apart from where the jobs are." Rather than have agencies provide or arrange for transportation for those they serve, the area agency now contracts out for transportation services. For the most part, this entails the use of vans - neither an individualized nor normalized option for many.

Waiting lists. Area agencies do not receive enough money to serve all people who desire community living or employment services. As a result, waiting lists are now common. According to one area agency director:

> ...periodically the legislature does approve a sum of money and usually it goes to what we would call the priority one people, and each area agency prioritizes it's own waiting lists. So the waiting list is going to be a major problem for us in '93 and it could be a major political problem.

Area agency change tactics seen as punitive. The Request For Proposal (RFP) process and performance objective reviews were seen by some as negative and punitive rather than processes that viewed providers as partners in decision making and change. Providers saw the process as potentially threatening to their existence since it resulted in the loss of funding for several programs. If the change process is viewed as punitive, the ultimate success of the changes themselves may be affected, along with the relationships with the people implementing those changes within the system.

Croched Mountain. Two of the state's largest ICF's are in the Keene region: Cedar Crest, a 25 bed children's ICF, and Croched Mountain, a private residential school that serves people with

disabilities from birth through age 21. Both are influential within the community and state. Given that the state is the first in the nation without a public institution, the existence of these facilities appears to be a source of frustration and embarassment. Reportedly, only a handful of the people who reside at Croched Mountain are from New Hampshire; the rest are from out of state.

Overselling supported employment. Supported employment has swept New Hampshire as the option of choice for many, if not most, people with disabilities. The question of whether supported employment was being oversold was voiced by a state official:

> My only real concern about it is that it seems that it is becoming the program of choice and I am not sure that there is enough resistance to say now wait a minute, you know, this person could go to work full time on his own without supported employment.
>
> The other struggle that I am now more conscious of is it is not enough, in fact it is not right that we are relegating every child that is coming out of the school system to supported employment. What happened to adult basic ed., and what happened to recreation and some other activities? So we've begun to explore a lot of other more naturalized ways of achieving integrated work for people that VR doesn't call supported employment.

Conclusion

Region V has received statewide and national attention for its strong programs in the area of supported employment and the use of natural supports. Along with the area agency, the three providers that were visited held similar philosophies regarding community based employment and person-centered planning. It was delightful to see a unified commitment to the people being served, as well as clear directions and attempts to implement best practices (i.e.,

practice what we preach).

In its continued efforts to fund and support individualized services and supports that are controlled by users, and to enhance people's employment opportunities and inclusion on the job, the area agency will need to consider involving providers more in the change process. It is also vital that consumers, families, and advocates are central to the decision-making and evaluation process. To this end, Region V should continue to develop as a focal point in New Hampshire as they strive toward integrated employment options for all.

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